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ABSTRACT

The School of Physical Education at Chichester Institute (England) has developed an outdoor and adventurous activities (OAA) program that trains teachers to optimize the full potential of the outdoors as classroom. The philosophy underpinning the OAA program challenges the traditional view that exposure to adventure necessarily results in desirable personal growth. Students critically examine images and romantic notions of outdoor adventure. Physical education students enter the Institute with differing experiences of the outdoors, and all take a foundation module in OAA that includes both theoretical and practical work, as well as an outdoor residential week. In the third year, all physical education students follow a professional course focused on the teaching of OAA in the schools. Other program elements include school experience; two independent research projects; and experience in the main activity options (climbing, sailing, canoeing, or orienteering). Students are encouraged to pursue national governing body awards in the activities at the performance or instructor level. Students develop an understanding that personal growth is not guaranteed through adventurous experience, but may be a product of a planned experience that includes opportunities for reviewing and reflection, an emphasis on group work and problem solving, uncertainty of outcome, and acceptable levels of psychological and physical risk. Related pedagogical skills for delivering OAA in the schools are discussed. (SV)

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Outdoor and Adventurous Activities in Undergraduate Physical Education Teacher Education at Chichester Institute

by
Maggie Boniface and Peter Bunyan

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RC 023873

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Maggie Boniface and Peter Bunyan

Outdoor and Adventurous Activities in Undergraduate Physical Education Teacher Education at Chichester Institute

Individuals entering the teaching profession are in a position to significantly influence not only the students they encounter but a wider population through colleagues and parents. They also have the potential to shape the way outdoor and adventurous activities are carried out and therefore attitudes towards the environment in which they take place. The School of Physical Education at Chichester Institute has developed a philosophy and learning environment where graduate teachers can optimise the full potential that the outdoors offers as a classroom. For this Institute, this philosophy is built on the premise that whilst many ideas, techniques and concepts can be transferred from other areas of the physical education curriculum (eg games teaching, pedagogy) and sports science (eg sports psychology), there is a uniqueness about the outdoors. The 'natural' environment is complex and ever changing, influenced not only by the changing seasons, but also by the global effects of human actions. Adventure in the 'natural' environment can provide dynamic and complex media through which individuals and groups, coming to this arena with different expectations, competences and experiences, may come to understand and respect the environment, themselves and others (Mortlock, 1984).

The philosophy underpinning the outdoor and adventurous activity (OAA) programme at the Institute challenges the traditional view that exposure to the adventure environment per se manifests itself in personal growth, and that such growth is seen as desirable by society in general. Students are asked to critically examine the images that they hold of adventure, and the romantic statements about adventurous exploits that have formed part of our heritage. The recognition that the adventure environment has only the potential and not the certainty for personal growth provides a useful starting point for students to optimise their work in schools and beyond. They are asked to develop an understanding of various principles on which adventure education is based, and how these may inform both the outdoor and adventurous activities component of the physical education national curriculum, and teaching in the adventure environment in general. These principles are introduced initially through theory sessions, and are further critically analysed through practical sessions and residential experiences. It is expected that every student will develop the understanding and material to meet the progressing needs of pupils in state secondary schools. Students are also provided with the opportunity through options and research, to specialise in teaching within the adventure environment.

Outdoor and adventurous activities within the Institute have developed over the last five years. With OAA being included as an activity area within the physical education national curriculum, its place within the new modular BA(qualified teacher status) degree was established. It is considered important that in addition to identifying the

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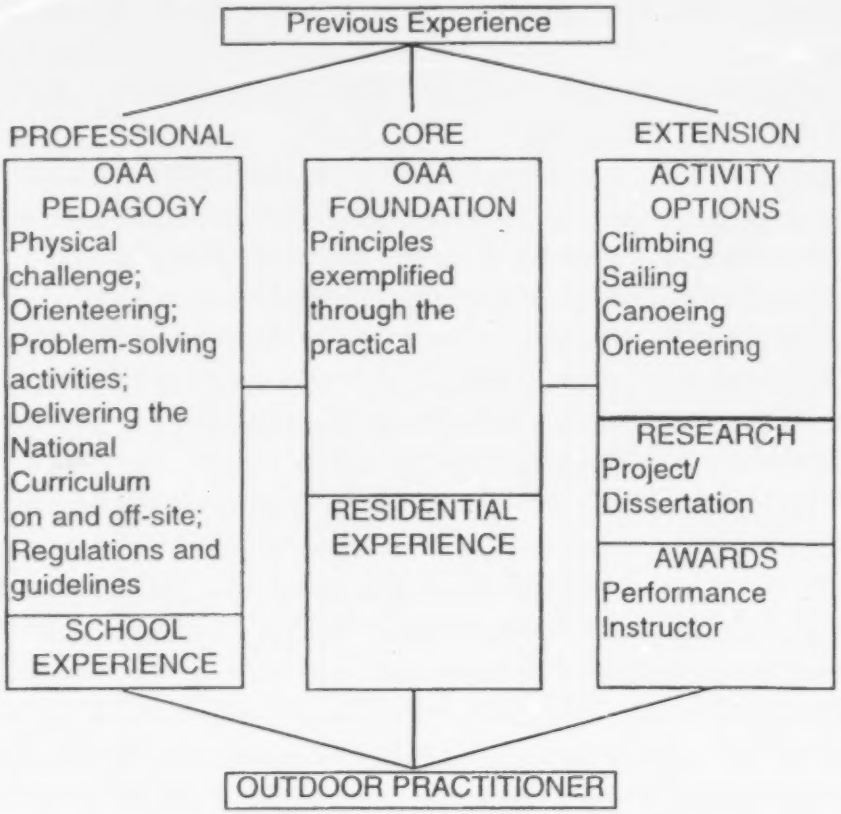
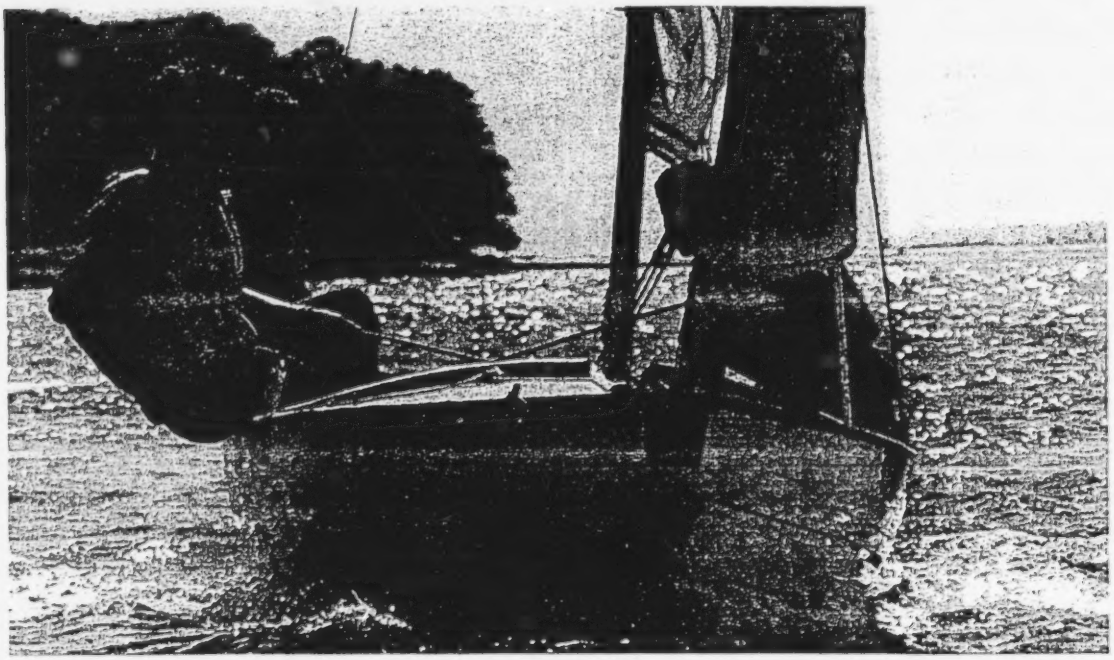
'material' of outdoor and adventurous activities and ways in which this might be delivered in schools, students are able to demonstrate an in-depth knowledge and understanding of this area and justify a programme in the light of relevant theory and research as well as intended outcomes.

Figure 1. Outdoor and Adventurous Activities Programme at Chichester Institute of higher education



Physical education students enter the Institute with differing experiences of the outdoors and all take a foundation module in outdoor and adventurous activities in the second year which includes both theoretical and practical work. This module also involves a residential week with the main activities - which provide a vehicle for learning - being either sailing, mountaineering/scrambling/climbing or low level walking/climbing/caving. In the third year, all physical education students follow a professional course which focuses on the teaching of OAA within schools. Additional optional activities (see figure 1) are offered in outdoor pursuits enabling students to build on previous work and extend their own knowledge, understanding and experience within this field. All students carry out two independent studies during their degree course: a small scale research project and a longer, school-related study. Either or both of these could be conducted within OAA enabling the student to examine previously identified issues in greater depth, and in the latter to consider

these within an educational context. All students spend part of each year in school and those with a particular interest in OAA will be able to teach this activity area, as well as possibly assisting on a school residential experience. Interested students are encouraged to develop and record their experience within OAA as a move towards gaining national governing body awards such as those of the Royal Yachting



Association, the British Canoe Union and the Mountain Walking Leader Training Board.

It is essential that an understanding of the process of adventure is based firmly on the premise that personal growth is not universally guaranteed through experience, but may be a product of a planned experience which optimises both human and environmental resources. OAA within the Institute is seen to sit within an overall safety framework and it is vital that safe practice forms an integral part of any learning experience where students take increasing responsibility for the safety of themselves and others.

Reviewing in OAA is considered by some to be as important as the activity itself (Greenaway, 1993), particularly where activities are seen as a means to an end (that is, the process is seen to be more important, or as important as the outcome). Students are encouraged to reflect on and analyse their own experiences as well as increase their understanding of reviewing skills and techniques for use when working in schools. The plan-do-review model provides the focus for students' involvement in 'problem solving' and 'physical challenge' activities where group dynamics and awareness are considered. Due to the short duration of initiative activities such as the 'spiders web' or 'leaky tube' students can quickly experience the importance and structure of the plan-do-review activity phases. Focusing on the individual and group

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processes involved in working effectively as a member of a team enables them to refine their understanding of group work and problem solving, and perhaps see this as transferable into other areas of OAA, education and life in general.

For an experience to be adventurous there has to be uncertainty of outcome (Priest, 1990). Quinn (1990) notes that going beyond what one thinks they can accomplish leads to personal growth. With uncertainty of outcome comes risk (the potential to lose something of value) which could be related to the physical, psychological or social (for example, fear of injury, failure or not being accepted by the group) and which can be identified as perceived or real. This has implications for both personal and social development (Humberstone, 1992). In Education, to maximise safety the risk needs to be structured so that it is perceived as being high whilst in reality it is controlled and at an acceptably low level. A top rope climbing session demonstrates to inexperienced students after their first fall that their initial risk perceptions were incorrect and that in reality they have been exposed to little in terms of real danger.

In considering the individual nature of adventure and perceptions of risk, the notion of the adventure experience paradigm, as constructed by Priest and Martin (1985), is introduced together with Weiss's (1987) notion of optimal challenge and accepted physical and psychological risk. Students are made aware that tasks need to be differentiated with consideration given to such factors as previous experience, ability, personality, interpersonal skills, perceptions of competence/risk and levels of anxiety of pupils. Differentiation in OAA within the Institute is therefore considered with reference to the students themselves and their own development, as well as with reference to work carried out by them in schools. The Institute encourages a culture where

students judge their own actions in terms of personal competence and risk rather than peer equivalence.

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When constructing outdoor and adventurous activities, the teacher, in many cases, needs to become a facilitator creating 'situations in which participants encounter opportunities to learn about themselves and others through direct experience' (Knapp, 1990:191). Whilst not becoming disassociated, the teacher enables the pupils, where possible, to take responsibility for their learning environment and outcomes. It has been documented that for self esteem, perceptions of competence and self confidence to be positively effected an individual needs to consider themselves responsible for the outcomes of a task (Priest, 1991). Succeeding at a challenge seen as easy could be attributed to task ease rather than individual competence, or succeeding at one seen as difficult could be attributed to luck. However, there are likely to be times or situations where procedures need to be exact, pupils need to develop competencies in physical skills/techniques or safety may be compromised. At such times a didactic teaching approach may be the most efficient and appropriate. Clearly in addition to considering the levels of a task offered to each individual, the amount of external intervention by the teacher and/or other members of the group needs to be addressed. This raises the question 'whose adventure is it?' and the consideration that for individuals to achieve success as a result of their own decision-making, the power and control to make such decisions needs to be handed over to them (Annat, 1995). Therefore teaching styles are examined in depth in other professional courses within the Institute and students are able to evaluate the appropriate use of different styles in OAA in the light of their own experience, the environment and identified intended outcomes.

What sets OAA apart from many other activities that take place in the 'classroom' is that the outcomes are seen to be 'real' which can prepare students to cope sensitively and compassionately with the real world. Thus the consequences of, for example, a map-reading error, a poorly executed technique or a successful action are experienced and remembered. Outcomes can be trivialised and their benefits minimised if a leader steps in unnecessarily to rescue a situation, or if the rules of a challenge such as an initiative game are not adhered to by the facilitator. An example of this occurred a few years ago when, at the end of a residential, the student group prepared for an expedition. It was explained, during the final briefing, that as part of the developmental process responsibility for the preparation would be devolved in part to the group. Before leaving the centre, one group failed to put their allocated tent in the support vehicle. It would have been all too easy for the staff team to have rescued the situation by giving the group the spare tent. However much more was learnt by the students when staff did not intervene. In dealing with the problem, the tact and resources of at least three other expedition groups were called upon. This event provided an excellent focus for group cohesion which might have been lost if staff had intervened.

Students are encouraged to recognise that the school and its locality have sufficient resources through which to deliver the foundations of adventure. Attarian (1990) notes that the use of artificial environments as adventure settings (for example climbing walls, artificial rafting courses) have the potential to become an accepted alternative for the 'real thing'. Developmentally it could be argued that it is only during the

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later stages of school life that pupils would be exposed to more remote off-site settings and environments where their initial encounters with adventure are further shaped, and responsibility for their own safety is perceived to be handed over to them. Thus opportunities need to be made available for students to consider and recognise the type of environment that offers educational potential at each key stage[1] and be in a position to construct appropriate activities that contribute towards end of key stage statements. The professionally focused module (pedagogical skills - OAA) at the Institute builds on the principles of adventure experience previously identified, and examines ways in which OAA can be delivered in schools in a way that fully exploits the potential of this curriculum area and enhances the development of each individual pupil. Initially the areas of physical challenge, problem-solving activities and orienteering are explored with reference to safety, on and off-site regulations and the national curriculum. Consideration is given to development and intended outcomes as well as environmental issues and ways in which the progressions of these activities might make use of areas away from the school site. Having been presented with challenges structured by the teacher on or near the school site (for example, to build a raft and transport the group across the school pool, or to navigate a group to collect markers as quickly as possible from around the school site) it is the intention that eventually (key stage 4 - pupils aged 14-16 years) pupils will be able to meet challenges offered by an unknown outdoor environment (for example, navigating a group across an open country area). Staff at the Institute consider the development of a respect for the environment and a consideration of environmental issues fundamental to all work carried out with students and pupils within OAA. It is when working with the uncertainties that the 'natural' environment presents, that the greatest learning and development can take place. However, for all those involved in adventure education, it is vital that the potential danger of working within the environment is understood along with a consideration of the impact that humans create working within such 'natural' environments.

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[1] The national curriculum for physical education is divided into four keystages that correspond to age ranges. To guide its implementation, end of key stage statements are documented for activity areas such as OAA and general requirements.

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